A SALUTE TO RICHARD WILLIAMS' ROGER RABBIT

THE CHARACTER OF ROGER RABBIT IS COPYRIGHTED BY WALT DISNEY PRODUCTIONS AND AMBLIM ENTERTAINMENT. 1988.

WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT? Animated film produced by Disney and Amblin. Released June 22, 1988. Revives the technique of mixing live action with animated characters, a technique first used extensively by Walt Disney in his ALICE IN CARTOONLAND series in the early 1920s. Bob Hoskins plays the live hardboiled dick. This style of rabbit was first used by Disney in his Silly Symphony THE TORTOISE AND THE HARE (1935). Someone had given Disney a couple of wallabies and they were jumping around the studio [see Green] so Max Hare's behavior was patterned after those capricious wallabies. When Warner Brothers decided to do a rabbit hunt cartoon in 1939, they swiped Max and he evolved into Bugs Bunny, who has a cameo role in ROGER RABBIT. Marvel will publish the comic book version of WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT?

HARD-BOILED

When you think of hard-boiled, you probably see Humphrey Bogart and Edward G. Robinson and John Garfield and George Raft. You think of Marilyn Monroe slinking her way through THE ASPHALT JUNGLE or Elizabeth Scott lighting up a cigarette or Veronica Lake shaking that leaf of blonde hair back from her forehead as she comes on to Alan Ladd. You think of Glenn Ford dancing with Rita Hayworth in GILDA or Peter Lorre's accent or the fat man sneering at the muzzle of Bogey's gun. You think of Dashiell Hammett and Nick and Nora Charles, of the strange narratives of Jim Thompson, the twists of fate in James M. Cain's DOUBLE INDEMNITY or THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE. You think of Raymond Chandler being critical of a nice little town like Hollywood where the women walk down Western in their bathrobes with cigarettes in the corners of their mouths and bottles of gin in their hands. Hard-boiled is tough talking guys and lethal women, the kind who might knife you in the back after an orgasm. It's amoral and existential, the only attitude possible in a world where morality has gone down the tubes in the wakes of too many wars. It's post-depression talk filled with the realistic rhythms of Hemingway and Faulkner and Steinbeck and John Dos Passes, with the witty one-liners of Dorothy Parker and Henry Louis Mencken.

Most people think of movie images, not books, not writing. That's because the movies gave us the hard-boiled *look* while the books gave us the *feel*, the attitude. The hard-boiled hero was a guy living on the street on very little money in a tough world where everyone was in it for him or herself and nobody was very worried about getting to Sunday services on time. He was a tough-talking, heavy-drinking, heavy-smoking guy who seldom stopped to eat. He wanted to make it, to be successful, but it had to be honest. He wouldn't touch any crooked money. He was the lone moral person in a world where morality seemed to have gone down in flames. Picture Don Quixote riding Rocinante down Sunset to do battle with the neon disco and punk world. In the end, the hard-boiled knight did what was morally right whatever the cost. Without that moral viewpoint, hard-boiled fiction would not have worked the way it did.

Hard-boiled was male. To understand what it was, think about what it wasn't. It wasn't the clean poisonings in Agatha Christie or Ngaio Marsh. P. D. James and Ruth Rendell are not Hard-boiled. Nor is Lillian Braun. W. R. Burnett Dashiell Hammett, Jim Thompson, Horace McCoy, Raymond Chandler, and James M. Cain are hardboiled. These guys are not into MURDER SHE WROTE [nice clean crimes for suburbanites], but into good old fashioned greed and lust. Hard-boiled is TRUE DETECTIVE and BLACK MASK, not SECRETS and TRUE CONFESSIONS. It was written with a male audience in mind, not for women. More often than not the women in the stories were temptresses, Liliths, vamps, seductresses, murderesses, part of a threatening world confronted daily by the man, the detective, the private eye, the Continental Op, The Thin Man, The Shadow, Nick Carter, Sam Spade, Philip Marlowe, Mike Hammer. Women were dangerous and not to be trusted.

Books like THE BIG SLEEP, FAREWELL MY LOVELY, and THE MALTESE FALCON are too well known to need discussion here, but let's consider a thriller like Harry Whittington's WEB OF MURDER (Fawcett, 1958). A lawyer decides to kill his wife and get her money. He's in love with his secretary. Tired of being a prisoner of the wealthy wife. Sounds simple, but it works out like a good horror comic story with poetic justice. Whittington's summary of his anti-hero is worth repeating here: "No one of my heroes is ever permitted, by his own disenchanted sanity, to believe in the sanity of the social order around him. For example, a nation in which an administration bases its policy on industrial/military complex greed, can talk blandly the insanity of *winning a nuclear war*, insists upon sixteen thousand atomic warheads when three will be more than sufficient, and spend billions on it while refusing crumbs to dependent children and closing the Library of Congress at 5 P.M. daily; perhaps because that leadership got where it is by having never read more than three books in its combined life span, and wishing to provide every youth that same opportunity. My hero cannot put on the happy face. He is pushed to the place where he can trust only himself, even when he recognizes the impossible odds he faces. This does not stop him because he would rather die fighting than to surrender to greed, corruption and meanheartedness, which places him as often at war with himself as with the uncompassionate and cynical power structure (xvii, Black Lizard edition, 1987)." WEB OF MURDER is told from the viewpoint of the killer, but it is the cop Vanness who chases him down and fate which gives him a worse ending than the electric chair.

> Hard-boiled was never taken seriously, you see. It was pulp stuff. Fast fiction for the slobs. Sneered at by the academy intellectuals [some of whom were writing it under pseudonyms]. Be that as it may, Hammett's RED HARVEST (1932) was every bit as intense an indictment of a corrupt society as Steinbeck's OF MICE AND MEN published a few years later. Hey, when Doctorow did it in WELCOME TO HARD TIMES, it was suddenly literature. Eastwood filmed the theme as PALE RIDER and it was suddenly pulp again.
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> What the hard-boiled writers did was analyze and attack social evil from the point of view of an ordinary guy who was usually a detective or a working cop or a lawyer, someone who would be on the street where the action was and could see how the sneaky actions of stock brokers and government officials affected regular people. Their method hasn't changed. It's still there in the new thrillers. So Bogey has been replaced by Arnold Swarzenegger and the theme is now high tech. It's still the same message. If you don't hang on to your personal integrity and fight for it, life has no meaning.

COMIX PLUGOLA

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CLAY GEERDES

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EC LIVES ON IN PARODY PULP

How do you parody pulp? It's easy if you're Charles Burns. In HARD-BOILED DEFECTIVE STORIES [New York: Pantheon Books, 1988], Burns takes on robotics, cults, cryonics, brainwashing, and numerous other contemporary fads and fallacies as he puts his mock hero, El Borbah through his paces. El Borbah could be Alley Oop in boots and a mask. With his face like a modified smiley, he is Burns' BIG BABY grown up. He wears a leotard that might have been made for a single-breasted Amazon warrior. It's color, purple, links him with Lee Falk and Phil Davis' PHANTOM. The dialogue is pure Hammett and Chandler. El Borbah drinks, smokes, thumps skulls, hates kids, and pushes service people around to prove how bad he is. The artwork is reminiscent of Chester Gould and Jack Kamen. The stories are E-C flashbacks by way of the Twilight Zone with the obligatory monster become the Good Guy. El Borbah qualifies as a parody of the hard-boiled detective-cum-superhero. He takes a bullet through the shoulder as easily as Batman, but unlike the Caped Crusader, El Borbah seldom uses weapons or gimmicks--just his big fists. There is a kind of twisted justice in Burns' stories, but it's probably no more bizarre than the justice we confront in the real world out here. Husbands and wives plot against one another a la James M. Cain, but Burns' art incorporates a lot of social criticism, often via eyeball kicks. Our local street paper, EXPRESS, Began serializing a new BIG BABY story by Burns this year and the Yuppie readers have written lots of hate mail about it. Yuk! Disgusting! Just the reaction any socially aware artist would want. El Borbah first appeared in HEAVY METAL, but I usually see Burns' stuff in EL VIBORA. He appeared in several issues of DEATH RATTLE and Raw Books did a nice hardback edition of BIG BABY dealing with the CURSE OF THE MOLEMEN. I thought he did just as well as Dick Tracy chasing The Mole or Superman in that forties serial. Great atmosphere. Burns chiaro-oscuro style captures the feeling of night and nightmare.

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BIG BABY
BY C BURNS
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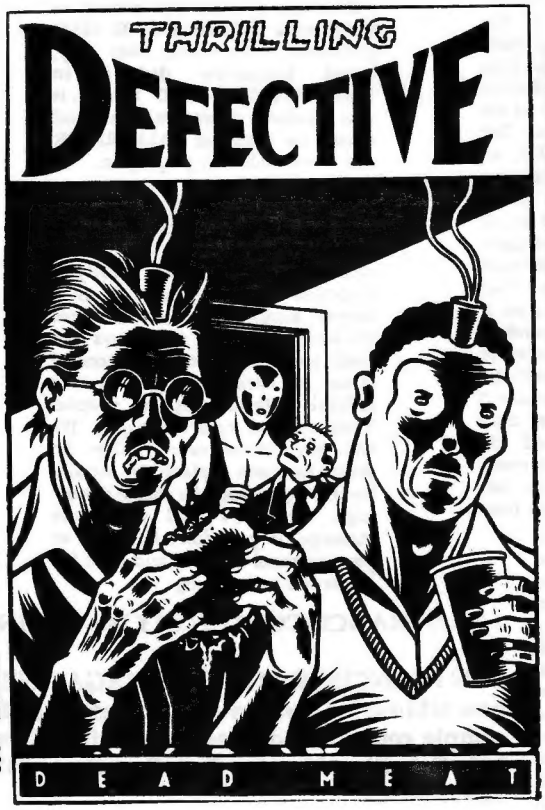
THIS SWEET SIXTEEN A HORROR COMIC TONY'S READING IN BED LAST TIME WE SAW THE CREATION OF A TEENAGE LOVE SLAVE KABALLA-BONGA!
MEANWHILE...
COME ON, RON... DON'T FEEL BAD JUST BECAUSE LANA STOOD YOU UP... THE THREE OF US CAN STILL HAVE FUN...
RIGHT... LET'S GO FUN...
LET'S SEE ... WE COULD CHECK OUT WHAT'S PLAYING AT THE DRIVE-IN...
SURE... I CAN SEE IT NOW... ME SITTING BACK HERE WITH A BOX OF POPCORN WHILE YOU TWO MAKE OUT ALL NIGHT...
HEY, LOOK! WHO THE HECK IS THAT GIRL IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD?
I DON'T KNOW, BUT STOP THE CAR! THIS MAY BE MY LUCKY NIGHT!
IN THERE... WHAT'S A NICE GIRL LIKE YOU DOING IN A PLACE LIKE THIS?
LOOKING... LOOKING FOR SOMEONE LIKE YOU!
NEXT: DRIVE-IN OF DOOM!



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